



# News Release

## IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

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### State to Gauge Interest of Potential Water Right Sellers

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The Idaho Water Resource Board, beginning today, will make available an “Invitation for Offers to Sell Water Rights” to hundreds of Southern Idaho water right holders to determine how much interest there is in selling water rights to the state.

The Invitation for Offers to Sell is not an offer to purchase. It is the first step in assessing whether the state can acquire 60,000 acre feet of surface water below the Thousand Springs reach of the Snake River to be used by the Bureau of Reclamation for meeting Endangered Species Act requirements as provided in the Nez Perce Agreement recently passed by Congress. If successful, the program will result in the rental of water next year from qualified participants.

Based on responses received, acquisition of water beyond what is provided for by the Nez Perce Agreement may also be considered to help balance the supply and demand for water across the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer.

The Invitation for Offers to Sell Water Rights, and associated forms are available at <http://www.idwr.idaho.gov>

Governor Dirk Kempthorne and members of the Expanded Interim Legislative Committee on Natural Resources, agree that the state needs to determine how much interest there is in selling water rights to the state and what the costs might be.

Under the “Straw Man Proposal” designed to help stabilize the East Snake Plain Aquifer and avoid a potential court battle between ground water and spring water users, The Idaho Water Resource Board, on behalf of the people of Idaho, may acquire other natural flow or storage water rights in addition to the 60,000 acre feet of natural flow for the Nez Perce Agreement.

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Both Governor Kempthorne and committee members stressed that the potential acquisition of water rights is only one of a number of actions that need to be considered in order to reach a settlement.

The Governor has also endorsed another element of the plan, which proposes that 100,000 acres of irrigated farmland be placed for into a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program for 15 years, through the Federal Government's Farm Service Agency.

Holders of junior priority ground water rights that are subject to curtailment under Idaho's prior appropriation laws are not eligible to sell their rights.

Eligible sellers will have about 30 days to respond to the Invitation for Offer to Sell once it is received. The Idaho Legislature and Governor Kempthorne will ultimately decide whether to proceed with the proposal.

The Bureau of Reclamation supports the State of Idaho's efforts to acquire water. "For the past three years, we have leased natural flow water rights to meet the ESA obligation for our projects," said Reclamation Regional Director Bill McDonald. "We look forward to the state providing the necessary water to meet this need in the coming year and therefore, Reclamation does not intend to run a separate natural flow leasing program."

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